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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT  
MONDAY, MARCH 16, 2009

In Today's Papers

World Water Forum Kicks Off in Istanbul Today

All papers highlight the 5th World Water Forum begins today in Istanbul. Papers report this year's conference seeks to "raise the importance of water on the political agenda and support the deepening discussions towards the solution of international water issues in the 21st century." Under the theme "Bridging Divides for Water," the forum will be held at the newly renovated Istanbul's Sutluce Culture and Conference Center. Participants are mostly water and environment ministers from 180 countries. Zaman says nearly 30,000 people, including more than 17,000 foreigners, were registered to attend the event. Papers note that 25 heads of state will also attend, including the presidents of Iraq, Somalia and Tajikistan. In addition, the prime ministers of Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Morocco, South Korea and Tuvalu, are among the participants of the forum. A Greek Cypriot and an Armenian delegation are also expected to participate in the forum.

For a link to information regarding this year's World Water Forum, please visit : <http://www.worldwaterforum5.org/index.php?id=1878&L=0>

Five Million People May Not Vote in March 29 Elections

Papers report the High Election Board (YSK) said Turkish citizens without an "identification number" on their ID cards will not be allowed to vote in the March 29 municipal elections. ID cards issued before 2001 do not have an identification number, which could impact up to five million voters. In a rally over the weekend, Prime Minister Erdogan called on voters to have their ID number added onto their ID cards. Opposition parties lashed out at the AKP government, saying the "untimely" decision should be put off until another election. The parties claim the number of people to vote in the elections will drop by half if they fail to put ID numbers in their ID cards, report papers.

The Turkish Government Announces 'Economic Stimulus Package'  
Media outlets report the Turkish government's new "economic stimulus package," intended to stem the effects of the global financial downturn, will commence after its publication in the Official

Gazette Monday. The USD 3.2 billion package, the fourth prepared by the AKP government, reduces tax rates in the automotive, household goods and housing sectors for three months to revitalize consumption and support the industrialists. Special consumption taxes for cars and household equipment will be curbed for a three-month period, and the 'Value-added tax' in housing constructions will be reduced from 18 to 8 percent. Farming Minister Mehdi Eker said the new economic package was going to contain some measures for farmers as well.

Meanwhile, papers report the IMF expects Turkey's economy to "shrink 1.5 percent in 2009." Meanwhile, mainstream Vatan reported Saturday that Goldman-Sachs predicted the Turkish economy will shrink by 7 percent in 2009, adding the contraction might reach double-digit figures if the economic crisis deepens.

Papers reported Sunday that Economic Minister Mehmet Simsek said Turkey is working to reach a "tentative" agreement with the IMF in "early April." Analysts say the AKP government deliberately delayed finalizing a deal with the IMF, which would set tight spending norms, until after the elections. On Friday in Eskisehir, Prime Minister Erdogan reiterated "the economic crisis will bypass Turkey," adding "Turkey will overcome this period with minimum damage."

Talabani: "Iraq Will not be Disintegrated." (Sabah)  
Mainstream Sabah carries an exclusive interview with Jalal Talabani, conducted in Suleymaniye prior to the Iraqi President's travel to Istanbul for the 5th World Water Forum summit talks. Talabani said Iraq "would not be disintegrated," and "it is in the Iraqi Kurds' interest to stay within Iraq." "The civil war is over, and the

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Iraqi Kurds are part of Iraq," he said. Talabani stressed the KRG President Massoud Barzani shares his views. He said the "Greater Kurdistan" ideal was a "pipe dream left in poems." "We, however, cannot carry on dreaming. "How is it possible to divide Turkey, Iran and Iraq," in order to create an independent Kurdish state, Talabani emphasized. On a question about the "mistakes" of the Bush administration on Iraq, Talabani said, "Bush is a hero who has liberated Iraq. In Iraq, Americans made mistakes in a land they did not know; but in general, Bush's Iraq policy was friendly." The Iraqi President also underscored that terrorism is "dying" in Iraq, and even the al-Anbar region is more secure today.

Meanwhile, mainstream Sabah reports the KRG President Mesud Barzani told the London-based al-Aswat daily that he did not expect military threats from Turkey due to the relationship that has developed recently. "Trade cooperation between northern Iraq and Turkey is growing," said Barzani, underlining more than 500 Turkish companies were working in northern Iraq.

Former Naval Commander Admits 'Wrongdoings' in Prior Official Kurdish Policy  
Former Turkish Naval Forces commander Admiral Salim Dervisoglu told the Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak "Turkey's Kurdish problem cannot be solved with military methods." Dervisoglu noted, "We failed to take the necessary economic steps. We could not integrate those people, we only tried to assimilate them." He suggested that a "new policy" must be determined. Dervisoglu said "Turkey is afraid that northern Iraq will become a center of attention," and "In order to relieve that fear, we must make our own geography a center of attention. We must begin by eliminating the economic, social and cultural divisions in our country." On the AKP government's initiatives regarding the Kurdish question, Dervisoglu said he approves many forward steps taken by the ruling government. "Governments cannot take all steps swiftly, they must manage the psychologically surrounding the issue as well. It's also important that a consensus is formed among the institutions in this process," said Dervisoglu.

Editorial Commentary on President Obama's Visit to Turkey and the Upcoming Armenian Genocide Resolution Issue

Semih Idiz wrote in mainstream Milliyet: "Once again, as is the case every April in the U.S., the Armenian genocide debate has come up. This time the issue is a matter of uneasiness not only for Ankara,

but also for the Obama administration and for the Yerevan administration. President Obama is stuck between Turkey's growing regional importance and his campaign pledges to the Armenian lobby in the United States. There are an increasing number of commentaries arguing that even President Obama does not know how to overcome this impasse. Ankara, on the other hand, feels that Obama's visit to Turkey does not automatically rule out Washington's pronouncement of genocide on April 24. Yerevan is stuck as well. The Armenian administration does not want to ruin the ongoing reconciliation process with Turkey, but is unable to present a different approach to the AGR issue due to the likely political ramifications. While the Armenian administration focuses on regional realities that call for more cooperation with Turkey on every field, the Armenian Diaspora acts completely carelessly about Yerevan's realities. My personal opinion is that once again on April 24 the importance of general conjuncture will prevail and the Armenian lobby will not get what it really wants. It is equally sad to see the same uneasiness surround both the Turkish and Armenian nations every April; now is the time for the two nations to find a better way to address this issue."

Omer Taspinar wrote in mainstream Sabah: "The timing of the Obama visit should not be a reason for false hopes regarding the Armenian genocide issue. We cannot take Washington's favorable treatment of Ankara for granted and assume that President Obama will not agree with the Armenian lobby efforts. First of all, it may well be a

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matter of political integrity for Obama since he made some pledges during his election campaign. There is a good way to counter this process by paving the way for more dialogue and relationship with Armenia. Opening Turkey the Armenia border before April 24 will be the best thing to do."

TV News (CNN-Turk)

Domestic

- The Finance Ministry for the second time rejected the guarantees, i.e. shares in Star and Kanal D television channels, offered by Dogan Media Group in connection with the payment of a heavy tax fine of USD 534 million. The Finance Ministry might freeze the assets of the group.

- The Observer comments Turkey's rival political factions are in a row over academic freedom after state officials forced a science journal to scrap an article celebrating the work of Charles Darwin.

- The Financial Times underlines the high costs of laying track across mountainous terrain for Turkey's first high-speed train.

- The TGS announced four PKK militants were killed during the air raids on PKK's Zap, Cemko, and Zagros camps from March 11-13. Military activities continue in the Siirt, Hakkari and Sirnak provinces declared as "temporary security zone" until June 15.

World

- Iraq's PM Nuri al-Maliki says US troops will not be removed from areas that are not completely secure or where attacks could resume after the Americans leave.

- In the aftermath of Israel's military offensive in Gaza and the February elections, Israelis and Palestinians maintain hawkish positions regarding the peace process.

- Former Vice President Dick Cheney says that by jettisoning key elements of the Bush administration's approach to terrorism, President Obama had increased the risk of more attacks on the country.

- Rioters clash with police in Northern Ireland following the arrests of three men on suspicion of killing two British soldiers last week.

